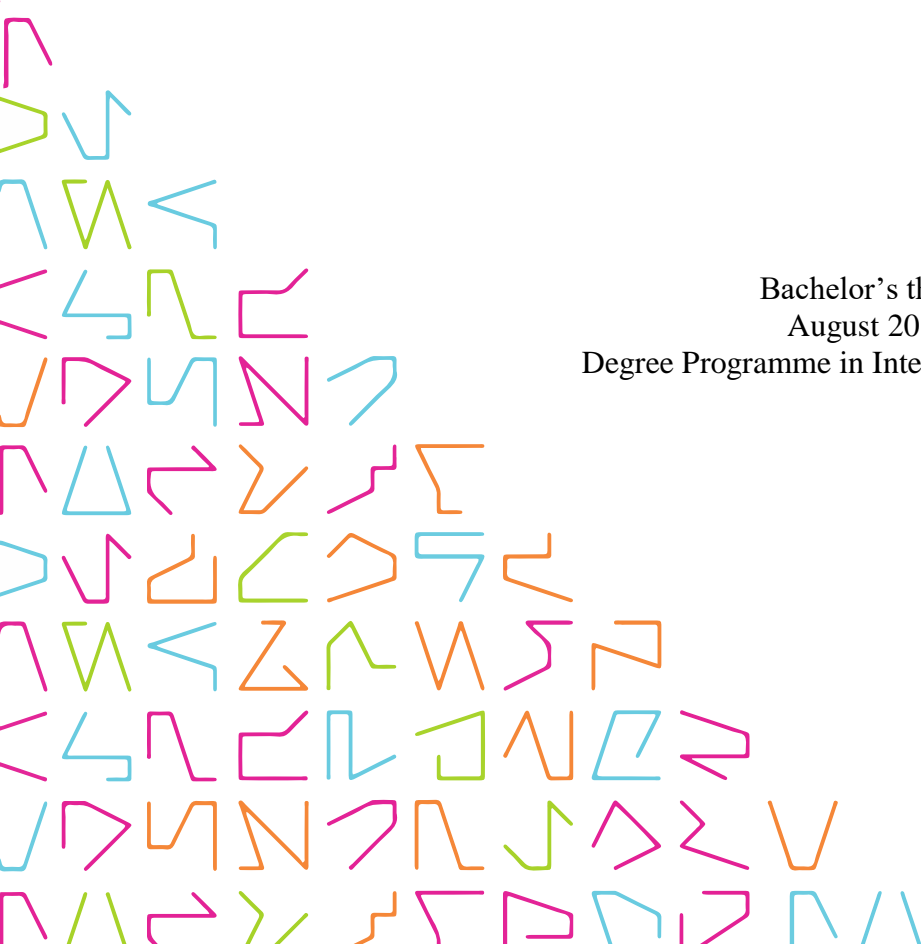


Digital Communications Plan:

Seek Tapahtumasuunnittelu

Eveliina Mikkonen

Bachelor's thesis
August 2015
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ABSTRACT

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The thesis was commissioned by event planning company Seek tapahtumasuunnittelu. Seek tapahtumasuunnittelu is a new company, that was recently founded by to women. The company operates in Pirkanmaa region offering event planning services for individuals. As a new company, Seek tapahtumasuunnittelu needed ways to get visibility and gain foothold in the market.

The aim of the thesis was to gain insight about the possibilities that digital communication channels offer for companies as well as to come up with recommendations on how the digital presence of the commissioning company should be established. The marketing process and the concept of marketing communications were studied to build theoretical foundation for the study. The effects of digitalization and the tools it offers for marketing communications were introduced to offer perspective to the topic of the thesis. Researching these concepts provided the author with

Quantitative research was conducted to collect primary data for the purpose of the thesis. Surveying people living in Pirkanmaa helped determine the search methods that possible customers would use to seek information, the importance of the website and the most essential online channels for event planning company. Results of the survey suggested that the most important component of online presence is the website. By analyzing the results the main elements of the website were defined and presented to the case company to help with the website design. The results also offered company valuable information about the social media channels that should be focused on in the beginning of the digital engagement.

This thesis provided commissioning company knowledge on how digital media can benefit the company and how to use it as an effective communications tool. Determining the most important online channels offered the commissioning company valuable information that helps them to form effective marketing communications plan.

Key words: digital communications, digital marketing, social media channels

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1 INTRODUCTION

Technology development has had a substantial impact on the world of marketing. Digitalization has changed how people experience marketing and marketing communication. Thanks to internet and social media, consumers are now more active participants than inactive bystanders in the marketing process. Traditional marketing methods still exist, but they are facing a great transformation, as these new and innovative media- and marketing opportunities are challenging them. In a short period of time various new online platforms have been born creating both challenges as well as exiting possibilities for marketers. (Leino 2010, 34) These possibilities can especially benefit smaller companies, since they do not necessarily require as much financial investment.

One must keep in mind, that from the marketing perspective, internet is different tool than traditional media like printed press, radio or television. In the web the customers are active participants and content providers, who have the will and the ability to make an influence. Understanding the difference between these two is the starting point of using the internet as effective marketing tool. (Juslén 2009, 5) Since the connectivity is the main concept of the digital world and it is what people are used to, it is important for the company to embrace this fact and offer the possible customers plenty of ways to connect with the company. People expect to find organizations online and sustain the needed information with only a few clicks. Planning an efficient digital communications plan helps company to make the most of those clicks.

So what can companies gain from existing in digital environment? It has been already stated that digitalization gives more power for consumers, but it also offers endless amount of tools, techniques and tactics for marketers helping them engage with those customers. If done right, digital marketing communication can provide great competitive advantage for the company. As Charlesworth states, effective online presence is essential for an organization to compete in the market place. (2009, 17)

1.1 Background of the topic

The idea for the thesis topic arose when the author and her friend decided to start a business together. They had always loved planning parties and little events and realized that all of that enthusiasm and interest could be turned in to a business. After researching the market and analyzing the competition, they saw that there was a place in the for event planning company. The industry is still quite young in Finland and most of the event planning companies focus on catering, not on planning the whole event. Finally (and quite recently) the two women decided to take the leap and become entrepreneurs.

So, since author was at the end of her studies and searching topic for her thesis, doing it to benefit her own business seemed like a natural choice. It was a perfect opportunity to use her education to provide extra value for the company. The commissioner of the thesis is an event planning company Seek tapahtumasuunnittelu.

According to the survey on use of information and communications technology, conducted by Tilastokeskus (2014), 86 percent of the 16-89-year-olds in Finland used the internet. Results showed that Finnish residents also use the internet more often. 90% of Finnish residents between the ages 25-35 use the internet multiple times a day. The results of the study also showed that the use of social media networks has grown in Finland. From the population aged between 25 and 34, 84% had followed some social media network service in the past 3 months. For the population aged between 35 and 44 percentage was 72%. From 45-54-year-olds 46% responded that they had followed social media.

These numbers prove that companies can reach a wide audience using internet as a communication tool. The case company does not have a big marketing budget and existing online seems like an important part of the company's marketing communications. Seek tapahtumasuunnittelu needed guidelines for its digital communications strategy. As mentioned internet offers many tools to connect with customers and the possibilities to do so are endless. To gain as much benefit as possible from the online-presence, commissioning company needed information that would help it to concentrate to the most essential channels.

1.2 Goals for the thesis

Seek tapahtumasuunnittelu needs strategy for digital marketing communications and the purpose of this thesis is to offer recommendations for case company concerning their actions online. Company has just been founded so its online presence is non-existent at the moment. This the thesis aims to define what the channels that the company should concentrate on when entering to the digital world. Objective for the communication strategy is to obtain general visibility for the company and acquire customers helping company to gain foothold in the market.

This thesis also aims to introduce marketing process and the concept of marketing communications and explain how recent developments in technology have affected it. The purpose of the literary review was to gain more knowledge about marketing in general and the elements of digital marketing communication. Company's marketing budget is limited and the aim is to find out what kind of low cost online marketing methods there are available for Seek tapahtumasuunnittelu to adapt as a part of its digital marketing actions.

The questions that this thesis aims to answer are:

- How to set up effective marketing communications plan?
- What communication tools digitalization offers for companies?
- Which digital marketing communications tools case company should first use to engage with customers?

1.3 Theoretical framework

Theoretical framework provides the study a perspective from through which the topic is examined. The literary review will provide the foundation and the theoretical framework for this thesis. The theoretical framework chapter of this the thesis includes introduction of the marketing process and explains the importance of marketing communications. The main focus is in digital marketing communications and the possibilities that digitalization offers for marketers. Digital communication tools and their value for the company are

also discussed. Researching these topics offered valuable information for the author when designing the survey as well as when making suggestions for the case company's digital communication process.

1.4 Research methods

To find out the most important digital communication channels for the commissioning company, author used quantitative research methods. Survey method was chosen to collect the data. Surveys are primary means of obtaining information to determine consumer attitudes and preferences and it is the most common method of primary data collection in marketing research. The method is based on questioning respondents. The advantage of the method is that it is easy and simple to do. (Malhotra and Peterson 2006, 131)

In quantitative study the outcome of the study is presented through numerical terms. (Krishnaswami & Satyaprasad 2010, 6) Survey was conducted using questionnaire form with fixed-response questions, since this allowed the author to analyse the data statistically. It also reduces variability in the results and enhances reliability of the responses. Using fixed-response questions also simplifies coding, analysis and interpretation of data. (Malhotra and Peterson Ibid, 181,187)

By using quantitative research methods, relationships between variables can be measured (Keith 2003, 2) In addition to offering information about the most relevant digital communication channels, this research also provided some information about the possible target market in the internet. Independent variables in these research were the age and the gender of the respondents and the dependent variables were the attitude towards seeking information from the internet, importance websites and interest towards social media channels.

1.5 Structure

Thesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter introduces of the theme of the thesis and the background for the chosen topic. Goals of the thesis are listed so the reader will

know the questions this thesis aims to provide answers to. Theoretical framework for the study will be shortly explained as well as the research methods used in this thesis. The commissioning company is introduced in more depth in the second chapter. The third chapter focuses on theoretical framework of the study. In the fourth chapter research methods are explained findings are analyzed. Chapter four also lists the limits, reliability and the validity of the research. The fifth chapter is the final chapter of the thesis and it consists of the conclusion.

2 COMISSIONING COMPANY

2.1 Seek tapahtumasuunnittelu

Seek tapahtumasuunnittelu is a newly-founded event planning company operating in Pirkanmaa region. The company was founded by two women who saw an open marketplace for event planning service. As of now, Seek tapahtumasuunnittelu offers planning services for social events (weddings, birthday parties, baby showers etc.), later expanding on a wider range of events. Company customizes individual mix of services for each customer depending on their needs.

2.2 Services

As mentioned, at the moment company offers event planning service for individuals. The service is customized individually for every customer because the company wants to be able to bring clients maximum value. Some customers might need help with finding the right location and the caterer for the party, but they want to decorate the place themselves. For those individuals Seek tapahtumasuunnittelu offers bidding service, meaning that it gathers offers from rental properties, caterers, florists or any other businesses that customer needs to rent or hire for their event, helping them to make an informative decision without the hassle of conducting a time-consuming research. Seek tapahtumasuunnittelu also provides assistance with invitations design, and planning the decorations for the occasion. They can even host the event if the customer wants to enjoy his/hers function without stressing about anything else. This way it is possible for the customer to actually participate in the celebration when Seek makes sure that everything is going as planned. For example, in addition to creating stress for the bride and groom, weddings are also stressful for bridesmaids and groomsmen. When everything is organized by someone who is not a part of the wedding party, they too can relax and concentrate on the wedding.

Some people are just too busy, or lack the skills to organize the whole event, and they welcome someone to take responsibility of the successfulness of the event. Seek tapahtumasuunnittelu can be hired to plan the whole event from the scratch helping the customer with every decision making sure that they get the party they have always wanted. Company wants to give its clients the opportunity to have a party without the stress of the

planning. People have a lot on their plate just carrying on their normal life and many people don't have the time or the resources to organize an event. Especially when arranging a bigger events like weddings there are many things to take into consideration. It is one of the most important days in brides and grooms life but planning it might feel overwhelming when one doesn't have prior experience about the planning process.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Marketing process

Kotler and Armstrong (2009,38) state that marketing is more than selling and advertising, marketing is the process by which companies create value for customers and build strong customer relationships in order to capture value from customers in return.

When company is established, the market has to be studied and marketers have to familiarize themselves with customer needs, wants, values and buying behaviour. (Bergström & Leppänen 2009, 24) Only after marketer has a full understanding about market and the customer, they can begin to design customer-driven marketing strategy. When planning the strategy, company needs to know what their target market is and what kind of value they are delivering to the customer. Choosing the target market is done by market segmentation. It is a process where company divides customers into segments within the market according to their similar needs, habits or attitudes. (Armstrong & Kotler 2009, 41-42; Wood 2014, 64)

After segmentation, the company will choose which the target segments are and how it aims to serve them. Value proposition is the benefit and the value the company promises to deliver to its customers. It should help company to differentiate and position itself in the marketplace. Strong value proposition creates competitive advantage for the company in their target market. (Amstrong & Kotler 2009, 41-42)

Marketing strategy determines how the company will operate in the field. It outlines which customers the company will serve how it will create value for them. After establishing the marketing strategy, company needs to develop a marketing program. This program, which consists of the firm's marketing mix, shows how it will actually deliver the value for the customer and that way builds customer relationships. The purpose of marketing program is to transform the marketing strategy into action (Tikkanen & Vassinen 2010, 23; Amstrong & Kotler 2009, 45)

Marketing mix consists of basic competitive and promotional tools of the company. It is the framework of how the company will approach each target market. Although new approaches have arisen, the most popular model of marketing mix is still the 4P model. The model was invented by Harvard business school professors Neil Borden and Jerome McCarty in 1960's. The four Ps are Product, Price, Place and Promotion. Because this model is more used in marketing a product, not a service, 1980's Berdand H. Booms and Mary Jo Bitner extended the model with three more groups, people, processes and physical evidence. (Bergström & Leppänen 2009, 16) Organization must blend all marketing mix tools into their integrated marketing program that communicates the intended value to chosen customers. (Armstrong & Kotler 2009, 45)



FIGURE 1. 7Ps of marketing mix (Bergström & Leppänen 2009)

The most crucial step in the marketing process is building profitable customer relationships. (Armstrong & Kotler 2009, 45) Companies are focusing more and more on creating and maintaining those relationships. Managing the customer relationships creates value for the customer and for the company. (Bergström & Leppänen 2009, 461) According to Armstrong and Kotler (Ibid, 46) the key of building lasting customer relationships are satisfied customers. To build these customer relationships the customer needs to be aware of the company's offerings. In addition to developing excellent product, companies must also communicate their value proposition for the customer. Modern marketing considers

customers relationship management to be one of the most significant concepts in marketing.

3.2 Marketing communications

Marketing communications concept is an important part for the marketing process as it helps the company to build those profitable customer relationships. (Grönroos 2000, 264) The starting point of marketing communication plan is the company's overall marketing plan. The goals and the marketing strategies should already be outlined in the marketing plan and communication plan is designed to help company each those objectives that it has set. (Bergström & Leppänen 2009, 401)

According to Bergström and Leppänen (2009, 402), the purpose of marketing communications is to build brand equity, interest, trust and superiority in relation to competitors. It is done through planned marketing communications mix that consists of company's promotion tools. Armstrong and Kotler (2009, 330) categorize these tools in to (1) advertising, (2) sales promotion (3) personal selling (4) public relations (5) direct marketing.

Effective communications strategy can have a substantial impact on how the company competes in the market. Through marketing communications company can gain visibility and offer information about its products and promotions helping the company to build lasting customer relationships. When designing the marketing communications actions, it is important to know what message the company wants to send, and how the company intends to send it. Marketing communication plan is needed to define the objectives for the process. It identifies the goals that the company wants to reach with its communication plan and also determines the methods that will be used to communicate the message. (Bergström & Leppänen 2009, 328)

When planning the objectives for communications, marketers need to identify the stages that customer goes through during the buying process. Company can use the help of the AIDASS model to clarify these stages. When the stages are identified, company can set goals and choose the means to reach them. After every stage, the company revises how well its actions have helped the mission and change the methods accordingly. Using the

AIDASS model as a tool can help the company to determine how and when to communicate during each of the stages. (Bergström & Leppänen 2009, 331)



FIGURE 2. AIDASS model (Bergström & Leppänen 2009)

Marketing communications are necessary in every state of company's life, but the goals might vary depending on the situation. When company is new, marketing communication is needed to make consumers are aware about the organization and about the product. Later marketing communications might be needed to inform customer about new products or promotions. When company is designing its communications plan, it is important to factor in the current state of the company. (Bergström & Leppänen 2009, 229)

The communication process should be viewed from the perspective of the company as well as from the perspective of the specified target groups. It needs to be noted, that when the target audience is not yet familiar with the company, it is useful to use multiple communication methods to reach the target audience. This might be challenging because customers do not necessarily distinguish the message sources as well as marketers do, so if the message varies in different communication channels it can be confusing for customers and weakens the strength of the message. (Armstrong & Kotler 2009, 385; Bergström & Leppänen 2009, 229, 333)

Dahlen, Lange and Smith (2010, 115) explain that the cornerstones of good marketing communication are well segmented target audience, message and media which must me

integrated, working cohesively together. When the message is consistent throughout the channels there is bigger chance that the target customer understands it. Good marketing communication is also persistent, so it is not only a series of separate advertisements and campaigns. (Bergström & Leppänen, 2009, 400)

To address the challenge of consistent communication, companies have started using the integrated marketing communications (IMC) approach where the company integrates its promotional tools by keeping the message homogeneous in every communication channel. (Linton, I.) The IMC concept has been adopted by more companies because it makes it easier to deliver a clear and coherent message about the brand to the customers. Harnessing the synergy of company's communication to create real brand value. (Dahlen et al, 2010, 107)

3.3 Digital marketing communications

Matti J. Haverila (2004 184) states that Internet has had the greatest effect on the communication element of the marketing mix. In the digital age consumers are no longer waiting the marketing message to reach them, modern consumers are independent and able seek out the information themselves. (Juslén 2009, 16) This new generation uses internet and social media as a tool to take control of the content and information shared on the digital environment forcing marketers to change their views on marketing communication. (Dahlen et al, 2010, 448)

Throughout history marketing has been done through one-way communication channels using mass marketing methods. From the marketing perspective internet differs from other mass media's by allowing more interaction between the seller and the buyer. It is important to comprehend the difference between two-way and one-way communication channels. In one-way channels the sender is in control of the message. When the communication takes place in the internet, sender's chances of controlling the message are notably smaller. The communication does not work according to same principles since in the social media environment people can interact freely with each other. (Juslén 2009, 16, 57)

Charlesworth (2009, 17) argues that effective online presence is essential for the organization to compete in the market place. For the company to succeed online, it needs clear objectives. It is important for the company to decide what it wants to achieve online. Companies usually have three main objectives for their online presence. First is brand development, where online presence compliments and enhances the offline branding efforts of the organization. Other common goal for the online presence companies is revenue generation. It means that the company's online actions increase company's revenue by increasing sales. Some companies exist online to improve the service and support they offer to customers – and potential customers - at significantly reduced costs. (Charlesworth, 2009, 28-29)

Digital marketing communication tools and methods

The first step of using social media as a tool to engage customers and gain brand awareness, is to actively follow different kinds of networks and discussions online. This way the company has an idea about the audience they have in different channels. When designing a marketing communications plan, company should set clear objectives for its online communications. Whether it is to get feedback about the product or the service, get more visibility or strengthen the brand image, clear goals are easier to reach than assumptions about where the company's strategy might possibly lead. (Bergström & Leppänen, 2009, 378)

Sean Corcoran (2009), a former analyst of Forrester Research explains there are three types of media that companies should utilize in their digital marketing communications strategy. Those media types are owned media, paid media and earned media (Figure 3)

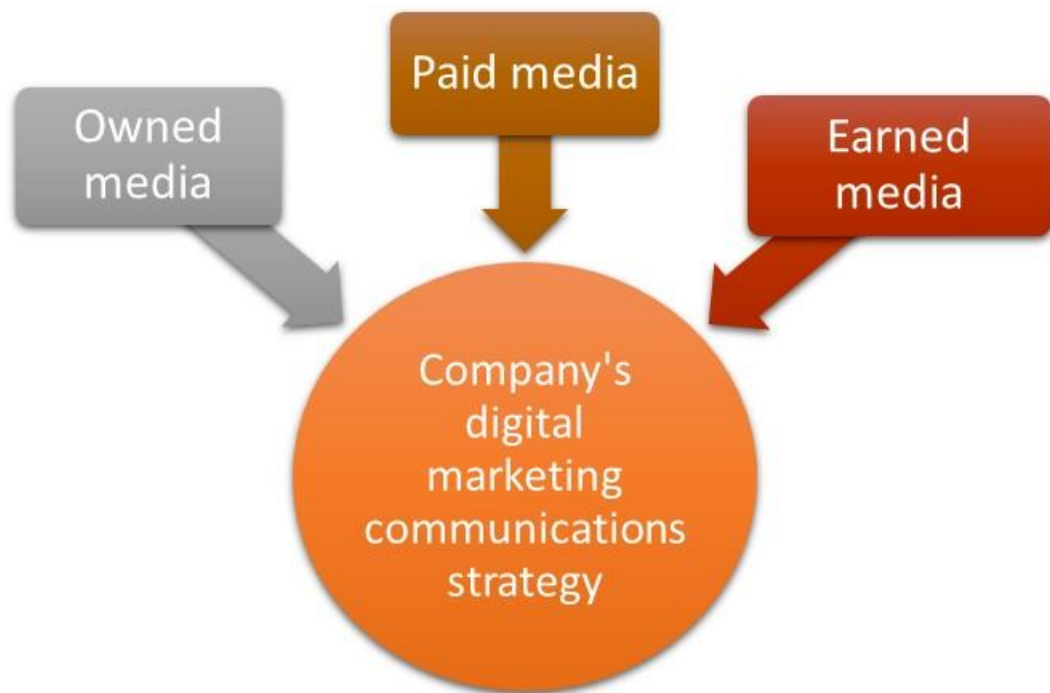


FIGURE 3. Three types of media (Based on Corcoran, 2009)

Owned media means any web property that the company holds. This means for example company's own website. Usually the first step for the company when setting up an online presence is creating a website. Website is important tool for brand building and should be viewed as the home base of company's digital presence. Website is the place that company wants the customers to find and it is the place where they can present all the information they want the customer to know. Website should be attractive to customers and the content on the site should provide value for visitors. (Annie Tsai 2013, 7, 17-19) Since the website is the face of the company online, the audience must like what they see when they visit the website. Website should also be always up to date so customers know that the information they find on the website is relevant and useful for them. (Bird, 2007, 162-163)

Search engines are facilitators of connectivity with information and knowledge. They are the tool that people use to search anything from the internet. One of the most helpful tools to get visitors to the website is search engine marketing. By using the instruments search engines offer, companies can help guide prospective customers to their website. Usually when someone is searching for some specific kind of product, service or company they are thinking about purchasing something. This is the time when company wants to be placed high in the search results. (Chaffey and Smith, 2013, 37) One of the search engine

marketing methods is Search engine optimizing. Search engine optimizing (SEO) means that company places specific keywords and phrases on their site, so that it will be ranked higher in the search engine results when customer use those keywords to seek information. Search engine optimizing should be done when company is creating or updating its website. SEO is seen as owned media, since company necessarily does not have to pay for it. Other method of search engine marketing is pay-per-click advertising (using for example Google AdWords or Yahoo! Search Marketing), where company pays for the search engine to display their site on the top of the result page and pay only when customers enters your site through that link. As you pay when the customers press the link, this Pay-per-click advertising goes under the category of paid media. (Leino, 2010, 116-119)

Websites and social media are powerful communication tools to increase awareness, build brand and shape customer opinion. Even though it is said that website is firm's most important communication channel, it is also important to take advantage of other elements of media. These elements can be used to engage customers with the brand and communicate with them. (Chaffey and Smith, 2013, 33- 37) Company and its products can be presented in many social networks (Facebook, Myspace, LinkedIn), or picture- and video-sharing sites (Instagram, Pinterest, Youtube, Flickr). This increases visibility and offers customers more ways to make contact with the company. In addition to social media sites, companies can also use different forums to connect with target audience (suomi24, naimisiin.info). Other good tool for companies is creating own blog, which can provide customers relevant information about the organization (Wordpress, Blogspot). (Berström and Leppänen, 2009, 337)

Company should also utilize online PR as their marketing tool in the web. When people see favourable mentions of the company, they are more likely to become customers. This is a low-cost way of gain brand equity for the company. Companies can also consider partnering up with other services which might offer them a change to promote their own business in partners' websites. Even though the partner would be operating in a different market, it could still have similar target audience enabling the marketing message to reach possible customers. (Chaffey and Smith, 2013, 37)

The digitalization has enhanced the value of earned media. As was established before, the internet offers people a way to always be connected and enables them to talk about anything they want in the internet. Comments that customers make about the company or about its products can have a huge audience and make a difference on how other customers see the company. It can be predicted, that when people see favourable mentions of the company, they are more likely to take interest. This is a low-cost way of gain brand equity for the company. (Chaffey and Smith, 2013, 37) Earned media can help the company's marketing efforts by taking it places that it could have not reached only by its own efforts. Still it is important to remember that the quality of company's owned media helps to generate the earned media, so the company should focus on improving its own web properties to encourage favourable commenting. (Hennessey, L. 2015)

4 RESEARCH

4.1 Research objectives

The objective for the research was to find out people's opinions about the kind of online presence event planning company should have. Case company does not yet have a website, so it was important to know what would be important for the customers. This information helps the company in the process of designing its website.

Since findability is a fundamental element in website design as it assists the company gain more visibility, Seek tapahtumasuunnittelu wanted to know what kind of search words customers would use to seek information about event planning service from the web. This would help the company to plan its search engine marketing actions in more efficient way.

In addition to obtaining information about website design, the aim was to get information about how they seek information from the internet, and through what channels they would like to connect with event planning company. Importance of social media has been discussed earlier in the thesis and the researcher wanted to find out which are the most important channels to focus on at the beginning.

4.2 Designing and conducting the research

Quantitative research method was chosen as the primary data collection method. To obtain needed information, researcher used the survey data collection method. Surveys are primary means of obtaining information to determine consumer attitudes and preferences and it is the most common method of primary data collection in marketing research. The method is based on questioning respondents. The advantage of the method is that it is easy and simple to do. (Malhotra and Peterson, 2006, 131, 181) The questionnaire was designed by using mostly fixed-response questions because when possible answers are already listed, it reduces variability in the results and enhances reliability of the responses. Using fixed-response questions also simplifies coding, analysis and interpretation of data. (Malhotra and Peterson, 2006,187)

The questions for the survey were designed after writing the theoretical framework for the thesis. As mentioned before, the main objective of this thesis was to come up with recommendations and suggestions for the case company on what they should focus on when entering the digital world. Seek tapahtumasuunnittelu operates in Pirkanmaa region, so the questionnaire was aimed at adults living in Pirkanmaa. The other purpose of the research was to analyse how the dependent variables (age and gender) influenced the respondent's attitudes toward seeking information from the internet, importance websites and interest towards social media channels.

The timeframe for conducting the research was tight and the company's marketing budget is limited, so the researcher chose questionnaire as her survey data collection method. The questions were asked from respondents face-to-face allowing the researcher to get lot of responds in a little amount of time. Also the terminology concerning the topic is quite new so asking the questions in person offered researcher the possibility to open the more complex questions for respondents.

The research was carried out 14.11.-15.11.2015 in front of the Kalevan liikekeskus. The location was chosen under the assumption that Kalevan liikekeskus was a probable place for people living in Pirkanmaa to visit. Researcher chose these particular days to conduct the survey, because during the weekend it was more likely to reach people of different ages. This made it possible to choose respondents who will best represents the diverse landscape of the Pirkanmaa population. During the weekend, the researcher was able to interview 78 people from Pirkanmaa. The researcher approached people by asking what is their home municipality and willingness to answer to couple of questions. The questions were asked only from those who were from Pirkanmaa.

4.3 Questionnaire design

Questions 1&2: Gender and the age of the respondents

The aim of the first two questions was to obtain information about the gender and the age of the respondent. This way researcher was able to see how/if these variables would affect

their answers to the following questions. As the survey was conducted by questioning people face-to-face, it offered the researcher the possibility to obtain responds from all the age groups and from both genders quite evenly. The respondents were divided in to five age groups; under 20 years old, 30-39 years old, 40-49 years old, 50-59 years old and 60 years old or over.

Question 3: Willingness to hire event planning service in the future

Questions 4-9 were aimed to people who could consider using event planning service in their future so the purpose of the third question was to filter out the ones who would not consider hiring event planning company. The age and gender were asked before this to see their impact to the dependent variable, respondent's willingness to hire the service.

Question 4 & 5: From where and how respondents seek information

Fourth question aimed identify the methods of how respondents would search information about event planning company. The most common search engine tools, Google, Bing and Yahoo are presented as fixed responses. Respondents also had the possibility to answer some other channel they would look information, in internet or offline. Since the objective of the study is focused in digital presence, respondents were not asked to refine the source of the information offline.

For the search engine marketing plan, researcher wanted to find out the most popular search words that respondents would use. Question number five (5) was open ended question where respondent could list the words she/he would use. This question was open ended question so it was possible to get more realistic answers.

Questions 6&7: The website design

The sixth and seventh question focused on the company's website. First the researcher asked about how important websites are for the company. The importance was determined by using five-point rating scale where choosing number one meant that website is not important and 5 that it is very important.

Commissioner also needed guidance about what they should put on the website and what is crucial, so the researcher asked the respondents about what is most important in the company's website. Respondents were informed to choose four most important elements and number them according their importance number one (1) being the most important element.

The elements were

1. Pleasant overall appearance
2. Recommendations from other customers
3. Picture references about earlier work
4. Links to company's social media accounts
5. Own blog
6. Short introduction about the company
7. Contact information
8. Contact form
9. The clarity of the website
10. Other, what

Questions 8&9: Social media channels

The purpose of the last two questions of the questionnaire was to determine which social media channels are important for customers. In the eight question respondents' willingness to connect with event planning company in social media was assessed and in the ninth question respondents chose the social media channels they would like to find the company. In the ninth question of the survey some social media channels were listed and the respondents were to pick the ones that they would wish the company to be presented.

The choices were

1. Facebook
2. Pinterest
3. Instagram
4. Tumblr

5. LinkedIn
6. Twitter
7. Other social media network, what

4.4 Analysis

Age and gender of the respondents and their willingness to use event planning company

The total amount of people interviewed was 78. From those 78 people, 45 were women and 33 were men. As the graph 1 shows the each age group was quite evenly presented in the survey.

TABLE 1. Gender division in each group

Age groups	Under 30 years old	30-39 years old	40-49 years old	50-59 years old	60 years old or over	Respondents in total
Women	10	8	8	12	7	45
Men	8	9	5	5	6	33
Both in total	18	17	13	17	13	78

Out of those 78 people 48 would consider hiring event planning company in the future. Table 2 illustrates that slightly bigger percentage (71%) of women than men (48%) would consider using the service. Even though sample size is small so these statistic might not express the actual situation but it suggests that women would be more probable target customers for the company.

TABLE 2. The age and the gender of those who would consider using event planning services

Age groups	Under 30 years old	30-39 years old	40-49 years old	50-59 years old	60 years old or over	Respondents in total
Women who answered YES	8	7	4	10	3	32
Men who answered YES	2	6	4	2	2	16
Both in total	10	13	8	12	5	48

Search engine marketing

96% of the respondents that would consider using the service answered that they use Google as their tool to seek information about companies offering that service. If company decides to use search engine advertising, the results indicate that most effective tool would be Google AdWords.

The responses to question five (5) introduced the key search words for the company. When designing the website these words should be included in search word optimization so it ranks higher when customers will search something using these words. 13% of the respondents would use the word “juhlapalvelu” to search event planning businesses (FIGURE 4). Other popular search words that respondents would use were “juhlasuunnittelu”, “juhlasuunnittelija” “juhlien järjestäminen” “juhlasuunnittelija tampere” ”juhlasuunnittelu tampere” and ”juhlien suunnittelu”. Also the word the word tampere was highlighted in the responses.

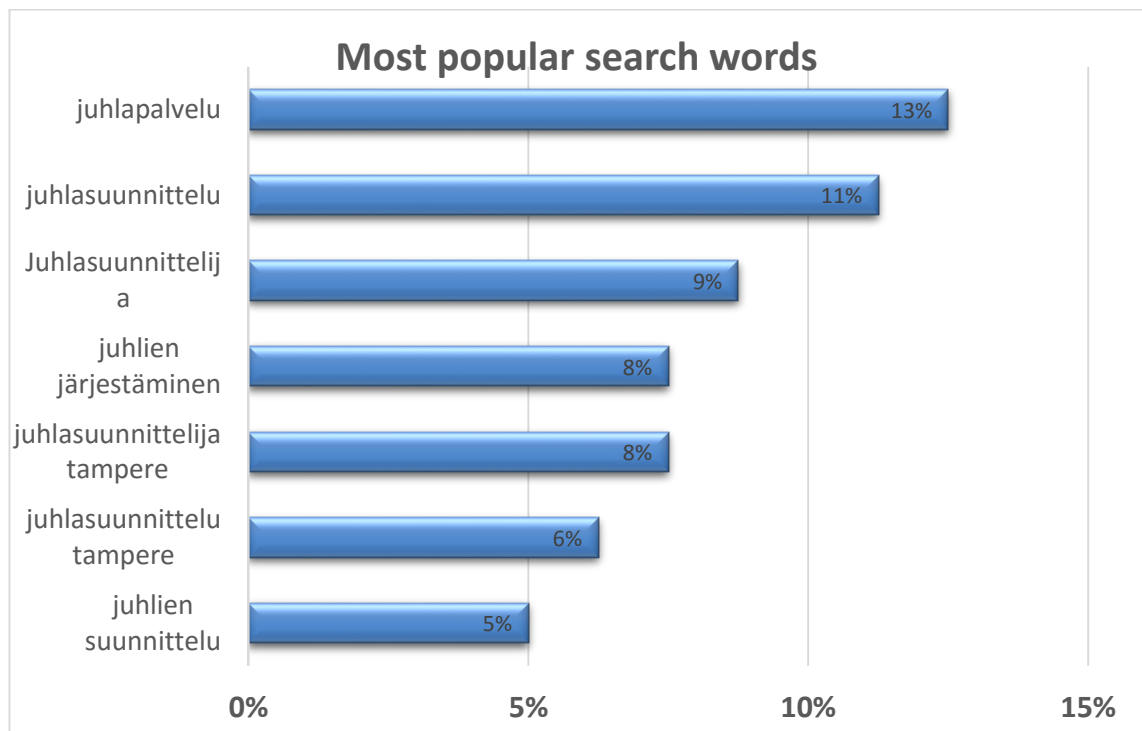


FIGURE 4. Most popular search words

Website

The importance of the website became clear when 80% responded that it is very important to have a website and the other 20% responded that it is somewhat important. Companies can be presented in many social media channels, and for example some companies use Facebook as their primary communication tool with the customer without even having a website. The results of this research still suggest that customers value websites and would like the company to have one. The case company should focus on designing the website early on during its digital marketing communication process.

Results of the survey also offered information about the most essential elements of the website. When designing the website, Seek tapahtumasuunnittelu should revise the results of this survey so it would include the most important factors for the possible customers. The respondents were to choose four (4) elements that they considered to be most essential and then rank them from the most important one. The researcher then gave points to each of the elements depending on their priority. If respondent chose picture references to be most important, it got four (4) points, the second one got three (3) points, the third got two (2) points and the fourth got one (1) point. The figure 4 introduces the most essential elements in the website according their priority for the respondents. The most important one was picture references and so even being a new company, the second most important element was short company introduction. The other elements that ranked high were clarity of the website, pleasant overall appearance and recommendations other customers. Links to social media and own blog appeared to be the least important elements for the respondents. These may be seen more as merits, not so much as mandatory elements.

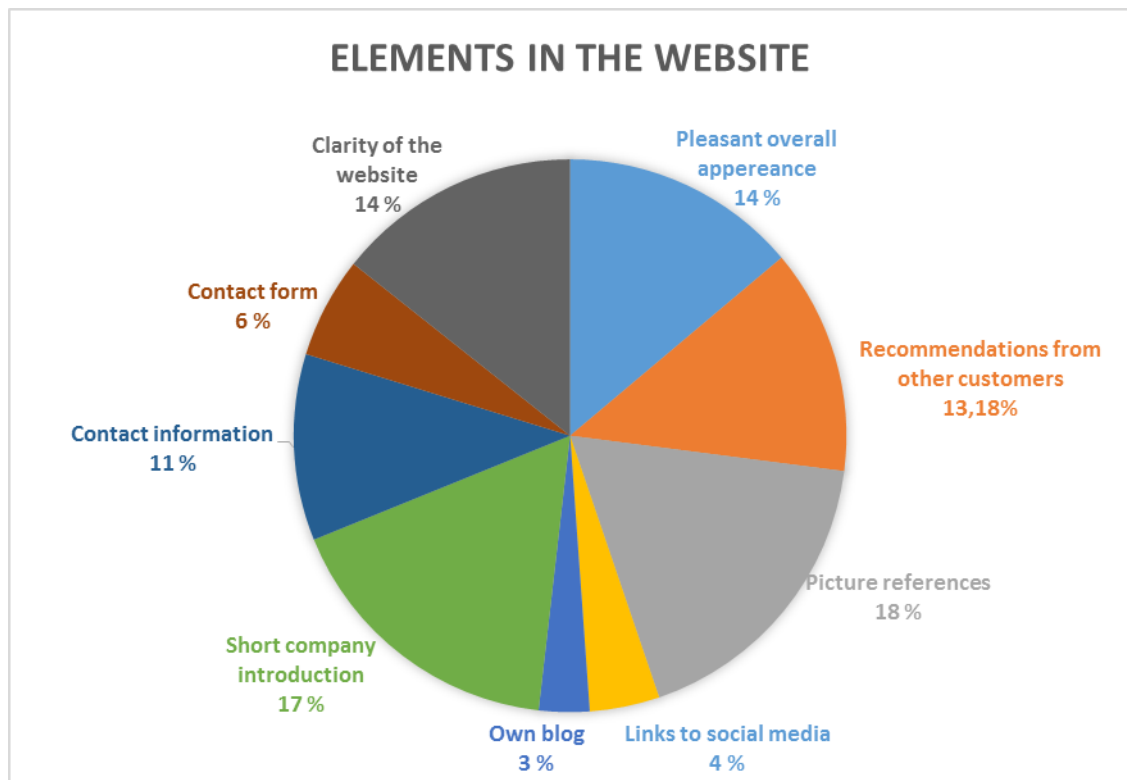


FIGURE 5. Elements in the website analysed according the priority of each element

Figure 5 is introduced here for comparison. It shows the analysis of the results according how many times each element was picked. The researcher gave one point to each of the element for every pick so the priority of the element was not taken into account. Using this technique the two most important elements remained the same so the picture references and company introduction are still presented as the most important elements.

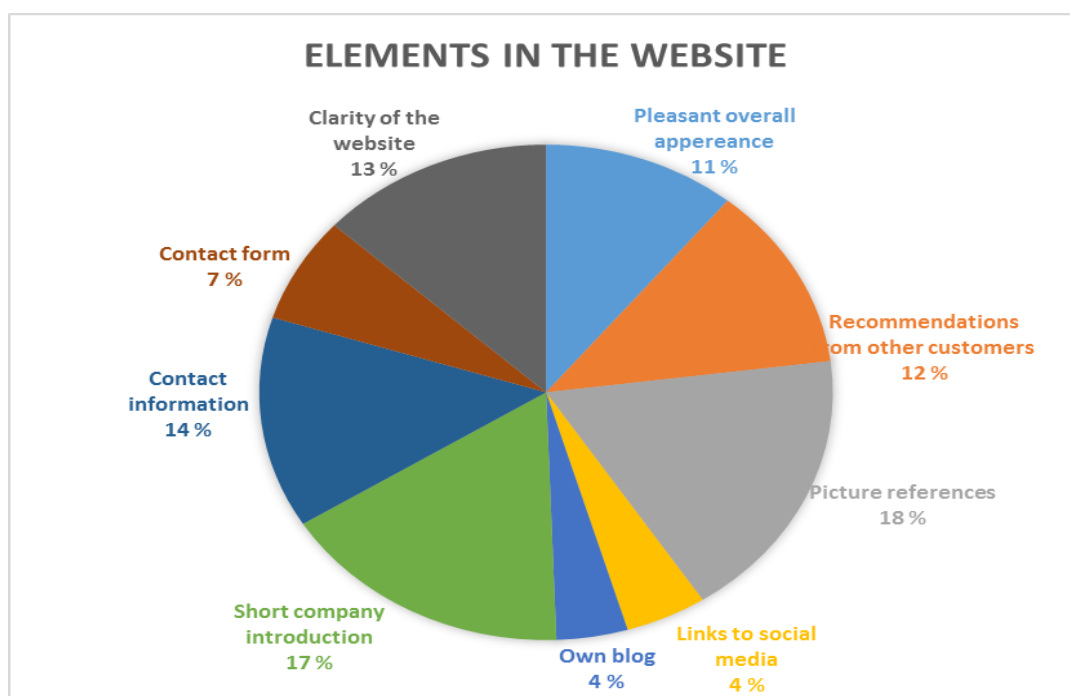


FIGURE 6. Elements in the website analysed according the quantity of picks

The researcher suggests that in their website, Seek tapahtumasuunnittelu would try to offer some pictures that are related to their work. Respondents clearly valued this element and it could help the company to obtain customers. Pictures are an efficient way to show visitors of the website what they could get by hiring event planning company and that could encourage them to get in touch with the case company. Since the respondents valued the short company introduction, the researcher suggests that the company includes “about us” page in the website design. This way customers could familiarize themselves with the company before making the decision about purchasing the service.

Social media

Out of 46 respondents 26 answered that they would be interested to visit company’s social media accounts and 20 answered that they were not interested. Table 2 presents how the age of the respondents affected their wish to find event planning company from social media networks. All of the respondent under the age of 30 wished that the company would be presented in social media network(s). From the 40-49-year-olds half responded the same. None of the respondents over 60 years old wished to find event planning company from social media. This indicates that younger people are more likely to connect in the social media while older people would only visit the website.

TABLE 3. Different age groups on wanting to find the company from social media networks

Age groups	Under 30 years old	30-39 years old	40-49 years old	50-59 years old	60 years old or over	Respondents in total
Would use social media	10	7	4	3		24
Would not use social media		6	4	8	4	22

The aim was to identify the social media channels where the case company should be present. Figure 2 introduces the most important social media channels for the respondents. The respondents were asked to number their choices according to priority. None of them chose more than four channels so the chosen ones were given points in the same way than the website elements. The most important got four (4) points, the second (3) points, third two (2) points and fourth got (1) point. As the figure 2 expresses, most of the respondents who wished to find the company from social media opted for Facebook. The second most important social media channel was Instagram with its 45 points and the third was Pinterest. Tumblr and Twitter got both 6 points in the survey leaving LinkedIn with zero points.

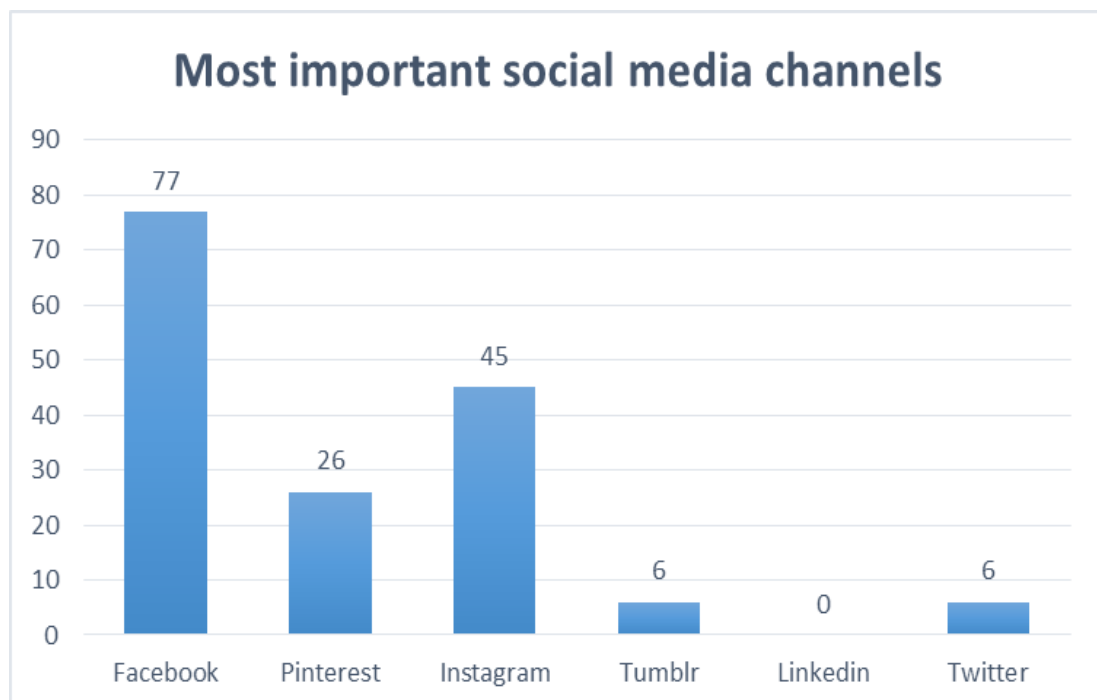


FIGURE 7. Most important social media channels according to their priority

The results indicated that Facebook presence would benefit the company and as it is the channel that respondents valued the most. The other channels that company should familiarize themselves with are Instagram and Pinterest. Author recommends that company focuses on these three social media sites as they are the most likely to benefit the company by offering additional information and references for companies.

4.5 Validity, reliability and the limitations

The short timeframe for conducting the survey affected the sample size. There are approximately 500 000 residents in the Pirkanmaa region and sample size being only 80 people so the results might not be representative of the sample population. However, the purpose of the research was only to gather some information about people's preferences in event planning company's online presence not to so much to offer statistically significant results. The results that were gathered from this research assisted the author to form better opinion about what kind of communications tools case company should include in its digital communications strategy and come up with suggestions for the case company.

Because the survey was conducted in Tampere, it is likely that many of the respondents are living in the city. This could affect the external validity of the study since the respondents were only asked if they lived in Pirkanmaa region. Because the home town of the respondents is unknown, its affects to the survey results can't be analyzed. The educational background or income could also affect the responses but the researcher chose to leave them out since it could have influenced to peoples willingness to take part in the survey especially at it was done face-to-face.

Malhotra and Peterson define validity as the extent to which results of the research answer to the questions it aims to answer. (2006, 274) Researcher aimed to increase the validity research by using face-to-face interview method. Using this interview methods meant that it was possible to explain to questions to the responded in a way that they understood the questions in a right way

The survey method was chosen as the research method because of its reliability and simplicity. Fixed-response questions were chosen to limit the variability in the responses and

to increase reliability of the responses. For the study to be reliable, the results should be consistent if repeated. This means that the research can present random errors in the results. (Malhotra, Peterson, 2006, 181, 276) When in a grocery store, people are usually in a hurry. Although the questionnaire was not long and respondents were given choices, it can be expected that not all the respondents took the time to really think about the questions to answer truthfully.

5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter offers answers for the research questions that were introduced in the first chapter of the thesis. This thesis aimed to answer the following questions:

- How to set up marketing communications plan?
- What marketing communication tools digitalization offers for companies?
- Which digital marketing communications tools case company should first use to engage with customers?

As was stated out in subchapter 3.2, marketing communications concept is a significant part of the marketing process as it helps the company to build those profitable customer relationships. Knowing the main elements of marketing communications is an important step for the company to succeed in its marketing endeavours. The first step is to get to know the target market. Company should have some information about who are the probable customers and what are their needs and wants. This helps the company to design its marketing efforts in a way that it benefits and brings value for the targeted segments. The second important step is setting objectives. As Bergström and Leppänen (2009, 343) have pointed out, the main issue that influences the objectives of the plan is the stage that company is in. New companies like *Seek tapahtumasuunnittelu* rely on marketing communications to help creating profitable customer relationships by informing customers about the company and its offerings. For them the effectiveness of the marketing communications plan means that they will get more visibility and build interest among customers. Researching the theory of marketing communications also highlighted the importance of determining the message that company wants to send for customers and design the communication plan in a way that it is consistent throughout the channels.

Studying the digital marketing communications concept more closely offered a clearer view about digital media. In subchapter 3.3 three types of digital media were introduced. According to Corcoran (2009) digital media can be divided into owned media, paid media and earned media. This division can help the company to identify the tools that digitalization offers. Each of these types include essential elements for company's digital communications strategy. Owned media is explained to be any web property that company

owns. This includes company's website, blog and its social media accounts. These are the places where company is in charge of creating the content. By using the paid media, company can attract customers to its owned media channels. Example of paid media can be for example search engine advertising. Earned media is one of the most important types of media in today's connected world. First of all it is free since it is created by external parties but it is also quite effective way to build interest towards to company. One way companies can encourage people to make favourable comments about the company is to create valuable and high-quality content to its owned media channels. Since social media sites are popular way for people to interact, they in addition to being owned media, they can also be part of earned media. When planning the strategy, marketers should think how to harness the power of them all.

To acquire customers company needs visibility and the limited marketing budget suggested that the marketing communication efforts should be focused to the internet. As the survey on use of information and communications technology, conducted by Tiihonen (2014) showed, company can reach wide audience in the internet. The intended outcome of the research was to provide Seek tapahtumasuunnittelu with recommendations and suggestions for their digital communications plan. As was established in subchapter 3.3., digital media offers many tools that help reach and attract customers.

The questionnaire survey was the most valuable source of information when deciding the most suitable digital channels since the responses offered a clear picture about consumer's opinions. The results of the survey suggested that company should start with creating a website since it was important for almost all the respondents. To ensure the successfulness of the site, case company should consider search engine optimizing since it increases the findability of the site. The most common search words, that are listed in figure 4., were found out to help Seek tapahtumasuunnittelu with its SEO strategy. There are also many social media networks to employ as communication channels and the results suggested that the most relevant ones for the case company are Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest (figure 7). The founders of Seek case tapahtumasuunnittelu are not experienced in digital communications management and this thesis offered needed information about the process and the analysis of the results informed them on what they should focus on in the beginning. This thesis provided commissioning company knowledge on how digital media can benefit the company and how to use it as an effective communications tool.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Survey questionnaire form

1. Sukupuoli? Ympyröi vastauksesi

Nainen

Mies

2. Ikäsi? (numeroina)

3. Voisitko kuvitella joskus käyttäväsi juhlien järjestämisessä apuna juhlasuunnittelupalvelua? (esim. sopivan juhlatilan/esiintyjien/tarjoilujen kartoittamisessa ja/tai juhlapaikan koristelun/kutsukorttien suunnittelussa) Ympyröi vastauksesi.

1. Kyllä

2. En

Mikäli et voi kuvitella palkkaavansa juhlasuunnittelijaa, ei tarvitse vastata kysymyksiin 4-9

4. Mistä lähtisit hakemaan tietoa juhlasuunnittelijoista? Ympyröi vastauksesi. Mikäli valitset useamman, numeroi valintasi tärkeysjärjestyksessä (numeron 1 ollessa kaikkein tärkein)

1. Google

2. Bing

3. Yahoo!

4. Muualta internetistä, mistä

5. Muualta kuin internetistä

Mikäli et hakisi tietoa internetistä, ei tarvitse vastata kysymyksiin 5-9

5. Mitä hakusanaa/hakusanoja käyttäisit lähtiessäsi etsimään juhlasuunnittelijaa?

6. Kuinka tärkeää olisi, että yrityksellä on nettisivut? Ympyröi vastauksesi

- 1 Ei lainkaan tärkeää
- 2 Ei kovin tärkeää
- 3 En osaa sanoa
- 4 Jokseenkin tärkeää
- 5 Erittäin tärkeää

7. Mikä olisi sinulle tärkeintä yrityksen nettisivuilla? Valitse neljä tärkeintä ja numeroi ne tärkeysjärjestyksessä (numeron 1 ollessa kaikkein tärkein)

- 1. Miellyttävä yleisilme
- 2. Asiakkaiden suositukset
- 3. Kuva referenssit aikaisemmista töistä
- 4. Linkit yrityksen tileihin sosiaalisessa mediassa
- 5. Oma blogi
- 6. Lyhyt esittely yrityksestä
- 7. Yhteystiedot
- 8. Yhteydenottolomake
- 9. Nettisivujen selkeys (tarvittava tieto löytyy helposti)
- 10. Muu, mikä

8. Juhlasuunnittelijaa etsiessäsi, olisitko kiinnostunut katsomaan yrityksen tilejä muissa sosiaalisen median kanavissa?

- 1. Kyllä
- 2. En

Mikäli vastasit edelliseen kysymykseen b) En, sinun ei tarvitse vastata kysymykseen 9

9. Missä kanavassa/kanavissa toivoisit löytäväsi yrityksen? Mikäli valitset useamman, numeroi valintasi tärkeysjärjestyksessä (numeron 1 ollessa kaikkein tärkein)

1. Facebook
2. Pinterest
3. Instagram
4. Tumblr
5. LinkedIn
6. Twitter
7. Muu kanava, mikä

Kiitos vastauksistasi!

